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ABSTRACT

This guide, which was developed for Canadian literacy teachers, contains practical guidelines for including people with intellectual and other disabilities in literacy education. The foreword examines the problems caused by various barriers that have traditionally excluded intellectually disabled individuals from literacy programs, and the introduction outlines the benefits of inclusion. Chapter 1 takes a systematic look at the various literacy programming options available in Canada (community-based volunteer tutor programs; library programs; school-based programs; literacy and adult basic education programs at community colleges; and vocational, job readiness, and workplace literacy programs). Provided in chapter 2 are "snapshots" of inclusive literacy practices in community-based, library, learning center, community college, and workplace programs. The following components of successful programs are explained and illustrated in chapter 3: strong leadership, supportive instructors and tutors, inclusive eligibility criteria and assessments, individualized instruction and use of resources, provision of supports encouraging accessibility, opportunities for tutor training/support, flexible approaches to evaluation, and outreach. Chapter 4 presents a sampling of successful instructional methods, and chapter 5 lists a series of questions and answers regarding tutor competencies and attitudes. Concluding the guide are a discussion of future challenges and directions and a 17-item bibliography. (MN)

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A Guide to
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A Guide to Inclusive Literacy Education**

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L'Institut Roehar Institute
Kinsmen Building, York University
4700 Keele Street, North York, Ontario M3J 1P3
Telephone: (416) 661-9611
Fax: (416) 661-5701
TDD: (416) 661-2023

Institute Director: Marcia H. Rioux, PhD
Project Director: Michael Bach
Principal Researcher: Melanie Panitch
Researchers: Miriam Ticoll and Anne George
Publications Editor: Laura Code
Desktop Publishing: Linda van der Beek



The Roeher Institute



Canada's National Institute
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Affecting Persons with an
Intellectual Impairment
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For more information about The Roeher Institute please contact us at:

**Kinsmen Building,
York University, 4700 Keele Street
North York, Ont. M3J 1P3
(416) 661-9611
Fax: (416) 661-5701
TDD: (416) 661-2023**



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FOREWORD

A wide range of barriers have traditionally excluded people with intellectual disabilities from literacy programs. This creates a significant problem because it compounds an already seriously low level of literacy among this population. Much of this low literacy can be attributed to interrupted schooling; because of the imposition of a label, many people have not progressed through the regular education system but have gone to special schools; post-secondary options have not been available; and those who have lived in institutions have had little or no attachment to the education system at all. Yet the numerous benefits that these people may gain from having a second chance at attaining literacy skills as adults — which is what community-based literacy often represents — are denied.

This exclusion carries with it further costs. A recent study by The Roeher Institute, *On Target?* (1992) found that literacy affects the rates of employment for persons with disabilities. Employment rates increase with educational attainment yet people with disabilities have less education than those without disabilities. They are unemployed; they are also poor. Twenty-five per cent of all

Canadians lack the skills to read and write; this limits their ability to find work and escape the poverty trap. Furthermore, this denies Canada the productivity and growth that comes with a skilled labour force. The crisis of literacy is significant in its impact.

When these barriers are overcome, literacy provides access to many daily experiences which most literate people take for granted. A comprehensive study of literacy policy and people with intellectual disabilities in Canada, *Literacy and Labels* (The Roeher Institute, 1990), identified barriers to literacy education at levels as fundamental as finding appropriate material and developing responsive methods of instruction. Although this is still the case, there are examples of inclusive literacy programs across the country in which people with disabilities are actively learning.

Reading menus, taking public transportation, identifying medicines correctly, grocery shopping, signing forms and finding and holding jobs are just a few of the skills people with intellectual disabilities seek to acquire when they enroll in literacy programs. Program coordinators

committed to operating inclusive programs and trained tutors prepared to build a flexible curriculum around the individual have identified instructional strategies that are enabling learners to experience success.

It is with the belief that more of these opportunities ought to be available to people with disabilities that we have produced this guide. Much remains to be done with regard to the policies influencing literacy education in Canada so that many more such opportunities will exist in the future. However, right now, those delivering inclusive programs have many valuable resources and experiences worth sharing. Others who are just beginning to ask for help and for new ways of including all learners can draw on this experience for strategies they can implement immediately.

There are many people who have made this book possible. I would like to thank Cameron Crawford and Anne George, who reviewed drafts of the book. In addition, we extend thanks to the following people who were involved in a consultation meeting in B.C. regarding the *Literacy in Motion* text: Patty Gibson, B.C. Association for Community Living; Barb Goode, Lower Mainland Community-Based Service Society; Janice Griffith, Simon Fraser Society for

Community Living; Ian Hunt, New Westminster School Board; Jennifer Nachbar, North Coast Professional Services; Betty Nobel, Vancouver Community College; Kate Nonesuch, Malespina College; Gary Pharness, Hastings Institute; Arlene Stiver, Vancouver Community College; Ludo Van Pelt, Simon Fraser Society for Community Living; Joyce Vowles, New Westminster School Board; Lee Weinstein, Invergarry Learning Centre; and Diane Ziebart, Jobs West. In addition, sincere thanks go out to the many literacy educators and volunteer tutors, program coordinators and program participants as well as the many other people who were interviewed for this study. Their time, reflection and ideas are greatly appreciated. The Literacy Program in the Department of the Secretary of State provided the financial support. Their understanding of the importance of inclusion that is reflected in their support is most encouraging.

Literacy in Motion is dedicated to the people who have been denied the fundamental opportunity to obtain literacy skills. It is our hope that this book will contribute to unlocking the key to literacy for these people, and opening the door to the world of opportunities and participation that literacy brings.

Marcia H. Rioux, PhD
Director

Introduction

The inclusion of adults with intellectual disabilities in volunteer tutoring programs is not only fair and just, but also desirable, attainable and worthwhile.¹

Students who register for literacy courses often share similar goals. Some want to acquire better literacy skills for job and career advancement or for upgrading their academic standing, some for the sheer satisfaction of being able to read a book to their children at bedtime. Others need to acquire the basic level of literacy skills in order to enjoy the advantages of community life. The ability to understand menus, bus schedules, street signs, bank forms and work-related instructions for operating equipment all require literacy skills. Even the ability to read labels on "No Name" products allows a person to choose that product over a more expensive item because the latter can be identified from advertising.

Three terms are frequently encountered in discussing literacy. The first of these, **basic skills**, refers to the rudiments of reading, writing and using numbers. The second, **functional literacy skills**,

refers to the application of those basic skills to one's social, community and working environments.² This definition accommodates the possibility that any one individual or group may encounter different demands for literacy according to where they might work, what they might read and their personal goals. The third term, **critical literacy**, refers to a level of literacy skills needed to challenge society. Acquiring this level of literacy empowers those groups whose experiences include marginalization and discrimination.

Whatever the differing demands for literacy that people encounter, recent research by The Roeher Institute indicates a very low level of literacy among adults with an intellectual disability.³ This is an important factor in their limited participation in the community, their high rate of poverty and unemployment and the many barriers obstructing their ability to enjoy full rights of citizenship. Despite the significant degree of illiteracy among this population, experts and educators in the literacy field agree there is little participation by people with intellectual disabilities in literacy education. Why?

A major barrier to participation is the lack of strategies at the program delivery level to facilitate their inclusion. Current policy development has not taken adequate account of the needs of adults with an intellectual disability. Consequently, the design of programs operating within these policies are not likely to support such students to participate. In addition, many literacy program providers assume that adults with an intellectual disability do not have the ability to develop literacy skills sufficient to make a difference in their lives. However, this assumption has been proven erroneous by literacy practitioners who have successfully taught adults with an intellectual disability. Many practitioners who become involved are astonished at the degree of interest and personal commitment people demonstrate. One tutor shares her experience:

Recently I began tutoring a man in his 50s who has been attending a sheltered workshop for many years. He cannot speak and he has not had the opportunity to learn an alternate means of communication. He still lives with his mother, who approached the literacy program to see about getting a tutor to help him learn to sign his own name. I wasn't clear at first whether this was something she wanted or whether he was also interested. I agreed to meet with him at his home.

He is learning to print his first name but he has an additional challenge because of his hand

tremors. In order to hold the pen he has to stop his hand from shaking, which he does by using the other one to poke the pen in position. Then he tries to form the letters. He keeps this up for one hour and a half each time we meet. If I had any questions about his determination in the beginning, I soon realized how much he personally hungered for the intellectual stimulation.

Innovative and creative program providers and individual tutors have begun developing concrete ways to teach a wider range of students. They have taken their direction from people with intellectual disabilities who have made their preferences unmistakably clear:

Doreen told us firmly and eloquently that she didn't want to go to "special" programs, that she just wanted to be able to meet people of all kinds who would accept her for herself.⁴

Many educators feel that literacy, by contributing directly to the acquisition of information, empowers people to participate more fully in their community. Some people sense that individuals need to know they have a right to participate before they can become actively engaged in learning. A sense of safety and the ability to exercise some choice in their lives are important and necessary preconditions for learning.

The poverty experienced by people with intellectual disabilities means that many of them are up against seemingly insurmountable barriers to learning: behaviour-



controlling drugs; situations where they are exposed to violence; institutionalization; poor nutrition; homelessness; and the self-hatred that comes with going through life with a label.⁵ Inadequate education, training and employment opportunities have contributed to their marginalization in Canadian society. A lack of literacy skills is often only the tip of the iceberg.

Recognizing the importance of literacy as a cornerstone to all other facets of exclusion, one project states in its principles:

*Instructors approach literacy holistically; conveying the sense that literacy is an act of engagement with the world rather than a set of discrete skills.*⁶

It is important to remember that, in our society, literacy and self-esteem are closely connected. People with disabilities have had a difficult time in school. They have been misjudged and mistreated, and others have made erroneous assumptions about their potential.⁷ Their decision to walk into a "school" situation attests to their courage to try again. Once in the door, the learning process involves its own risks and pressures, particularly from funders and organizations delivering programs. Front-line workers recognize and are sensitive to these:

It's important that when people take the risk, when they admit to others that they have difficulty reading and writing — whatever level they have that difficulty — that

*they don't have the extra pressure of thinking: 'I only have two more weeks to figure this out.' If you take away the sense of time as an enemy, it makes people feel a lot more secure.*⁸

This manual presents many insights and experiences that literacy educators, in their commitment to greater inclusion, have been willing to share. Some educators contribute the weight of years of experience, others share insights gained from tutoring just one person. Chapter 1 provides a systematic look at the various literacy programming options in Canada. Chapter 2 examines the critical components of successful inclusion and Chapter 3 illustrates, through a series of snapshots, ways in which each program model can serve people with an intellectual disability. A sampling of 10 successful strategies are highlighted in Chapter 5. Tutors are the focus of Chapter 6, in which a question-and-answer format addresses topical issues and concerns. The conclusion looks at challenges ahead and proposes directions for us to contemplate.

It is hoped that this guide will be useful for spreading the word about inclusion. Literacy education is powerful. Because it changes the lives of many who are able to benefit, people with an intellectual disability must have a greater chance to participate. It is incumbent upon all of us to reach out and make the connection, to stay abreast of strategies others have used successfully, to remove program barriers when we recognize them and to ensure that all people have a chance to realize their role as citizens in Canadian society. 

Chapter 1.

Literacy Program Options



Literacy opportunities can be provided in a number of ways. This section identifies and describes five different ways literacy education is delivered in Canada.

Community-based Volunteer Tutor Programs

Community-based volunteer programs may operate autonomously or they may be supported by a community college, a school board or an umbrella organization. The groups and agencies which provide these programs uphold the fundamental notion that the community shares responsibility for providing adult education. Typically, there is an emphasis on participation by everyone concerned both in the programs and in the wider community. In this sense, literacy learning combines reading and writing skills with self-confidence through community involvement.

A coordinator is responsible for administration, recruiting volunteer tutors, providing training and support and acquiring materials. The setting can be a community

hall, church, local school or a learner's home, and tutors work one-on-one with individuals or in small groups. These programs are intentionally situated in the community away from the often frightening traditional classroom environment. Community-based programs place literacy in a wider socio-economic context, promoting a recognition that the problem of illiteracy is a problem of poverty.

Literacy instruction tends to be learner-centred and responsive to the individual. The curriculum is determined through individual negotiation between the tutor and learner, and is often based on the specific skills an individual needs to enhance participation in the community. In some situations the tutor acts more as a facilitator or scribe than as a teacher, to create a more equal and mutually respectful relationship. Some programs promote the idea of "partners" in learning.

Many community-based programs utilize the language-experience approach. This is a popular teaching method in adult literacy and is based on the belief that adults learn best when the material is meaningful and written in a familiar way.

Library Programs

When people think of public libraries, they think of books and reading. Promoting literacy has long been part of the library agenda. Librarians want to share their world of books and so reach out to a wider range of users. There is a growing belief that libraries should serve a broader cross-section of people, beyond those whose education enables them to articulate their needs. As a result, many libraries have begun to work cooperatively, acting as a resource for literacy programs in the community. The concept of free and equal service is driving libraries to consider how to meet the needs of people with disabilities, as well as the multicultural community, under-educated adults and elderly people. Libraries offer an increasing variety of accessible reading materials and tapes for new readers.

Unlike other educational institutions, the library does not have a curriculum but listens and responds to people's requests. It provides a comfortable, informal atmosphere for literacy education. Frequently literacy coordinators and educators are employed or contracted by the library to provide instruction on an individual and small-group basis. The setting's flexibility can provide individual attention as well as opportunities for socialization. Participation is voluntary.

School Board Programs

School boards deliver academic upgrading and instruction through adult basic literacy programs. Literacy can mean many different things: basic reading and writing skills; re-training following an accident; or instruction in new methods of producing or using written materials. These are typically offered through classroom-based instruction. Some might argue that these programs offer higher quality instruction than community volunteer programs because they use specially trained, paid instructors and teachers rather than volunteers. Some programs use both paid instructors and volunteers.

Students can be included in a variety of ways when the program is delivered through different settings. These may include structured classroom settings or unstructured small groups, and some school boards provide drop-in learning centres and access to school libraries.

Literacy and Adult Basic Education Programs at Community Colleges

Community colleges and vocational training institutions generally provide both full- and part-time adult basic education courses. These opportunities are available through designated courses, academic upgrading or academic or literacy components in vocational programs. Specially targeted programs for adults with a disability are also provided at



some community colleges. Instruction is generally given by paid, specially trained educators. However, peer tutoring is also available through student services in some colleges and institutions.

Vocational, Job Readiness and Workplace Literacy Programs

These programs involve acquiring literacy skills in order to find and keep employment. In some cases, work-based literacy education is offered through employment programs or by unions and employers both on and off the work-site. In recent years the Quebec Federation of Labour and the Ontario Federation of Labour have begun recruiting union members interested in tutoring their co-workers. Aspects of these initiatives include sensitizing local unions to the issue of literacy, negotiating literacy programs with employers and providing tutor training.

The introduction of new technology and the streamlining of jobs are contributing to greater literacy demands on employees and prospective employees. This is compelling people to enroll in literacy programs. Because so few people with intellectual disabilities are in the paid labour force, their participation in these programs is only beginning. However, there are valuable examples of inclusive workplace literacy.

In order for workplace literacy to be possible, employers must get involved. That involvement means acknowledging the importance of employees' abilities to recognize significant labels and symbols (e.g., labels on poisonous substances, safety symbols, instructions to operate power and light switches). In addition, it means providing release time or additional pay for employees to participate in literacy education. Responsibility for this additional cost — whether time or money — is usually shared by employers and program providers.

Some employers of people with intellectual disabilities have asked that social and behavioural concerns be addressed in workplace literacy curriculum. Many employers view an investment in literacy education positively if it enables their workers to perform more reliably and safely.

People in many different situations can benefit from workplace literacy. Programs can be targeted to people with intellectual disabilities seeking employment; they can be provided for groups of people working in small, segregated groups; they can be delivered individually to those in competitive or supported employment; or they can be provided for workers in sheltered workshops. Workplace literacy for people with intellectual disabilities has been described by one program coordinator as a natural fit:

There are so many reasons why. There's the narrow focus given that it is real and right there. It is hands-on

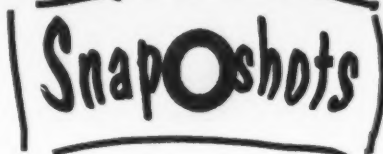


which means there are ample opportunities for repetition and learning. There's the worker's motivation to try to do better. Finally, there's a sensitive employer backing all of this.

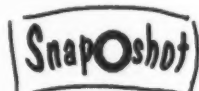
All these options represent venues where people with intellectual disabilities can be included to develop literacy skills. As more people move from institutions and segregated settings to the community, and as more people expect economic and social integration in the communities, opportunities to develop literacy skills will become more critical to their success in managing their daily lives. ✍



Chapter 2.

Inclusive Literacy in Motion:

People with intellectual disabilities are receiving literacy instruction through many different initiatives provided in their communities. Although barriers still prevent their full participation, evidence shows that it is possible to include people in a number of different settings. The following snapshots provide examples of people being provided new and exciting opportunities to gain literacy skills.



Literacy in a community-based program...

Robert Collie lives in a large urban centre. For years he has been attending a community-based literacy program where he is learning to read and write. He has served on the board of directors and, like many learners, has taken an active part in the organization, from doing committee work and public speaking to helping out in the office. Among his accomplishments is a reader he wrote for people beginning to read, called *Getting Along*.⁹ It is based on

his own experience and was published in The New Start Reader Series, a project of the literacy program he attended. He wrote the book because, "I think people should know what it's like in a sheltered workshop."

In it he describes how his teachers, believing he learned "too slowly," suggested he "learn a job" instead. They sent him to a sheltered workshop. He relates his experiences learning to get along with co-workers and staff — which inspired the title. Although he describes the work as "boring," he finds some satisfaction in getting the job done. He wishes for a future outside the workshop. "But," he concludes, "first, I want to learn to read and write."

Many learners welcome the opportunity to describe their experiences so non-disabled people will learn what life is like for people with intellectual disabilities. The exercise of writing down their stories records and validates the teller's personal experience. It also provides material to which others with shared histories will be able to relate.





Literacy in the Library...

Until she began the literacy program, Lyn had never been inside a public library. Given her awe at all the books, one might conclude that despite her 15 years at a special education school, she had never seen the inside of any library. She had come to join a literacy class but she found there were other things more interesting than concentrating on the group discussion around her. She preferred to sit at a back table and flip through books with amazing pictures. Not that she didn't keep an ear half-open to the discussion, but it wasn't interesting by comparison. She was taken with one particular book and when she returned the next week she asked at the desk for the "red book" she had liked so much last time. She was disappointed to learn that the librarian did not index books by their colour. Try as she might, Lyn could not provide any information to assist in its retrieval; she was not able to read, she explained. That was why she was here.

So began Lyn's love affair with the library. Her resourcefulness led her past the tutor to the library personnel themselves. With their help she learned how to sign a book out. They instructed her on how to make a proper request for a book, such as identifying a book by what it was about. Books she frequently asked for were on "working in an office." She discovered that she

could read her book on the bus ride home and be like all the other passengers who appeared to be engrossed in their books, magazines and newspapers.

She never did enjoy joining the larger group. Some days she would prefer to listen to a book on tape: Edgar Allen Poe always elicited the broadest grin. Other times she liked to be given a task so that she could practise her writing. She beamed when her piece was published in a bound collection of writings. She said she "felt like a movie star."

It is worth noting that had there not been an commitment to inclusiveness, a willingness to be flexible and a student-centred approach, Lyn may have gone another 15 years before she risked entering the door of her local library again.



Literacy in a Learning Centre...

A learning centre operated by a school board in western Canada is committed to the philosophy and belief that the school is a community. It is open to anyone interested in improving their reading and writing. No one is screened out and 30 per cent of the students have a disability. A child care centre, a multicultural preschool and counselling services support learners and contribute to an inclusive atmosphere. The literacy program

combines one-on-one tutoring and small group instruction, most of which takes place in a large room with round tables.

A prospective learner can drop by on any given day and expect to be approached by a teacher or volunteer offering assistance. If it is the first time there, they need to register, at which time a file is opened to track their progress. The students get help with whatever they came in to learn.

Whenever a teacher has a difficulty and seeks assistance in determining how best to teach someone, the first question is: "How would you handle this if there were no disability?" Evidence of the commitment to a whole language approach is found in classrooms rich in print. Magazines, newspapers, job-related materials, manuals and books encourage the use of both oral and written language. The centre's magazine of learners' writings has become internationally famous.

Dynamic and visionary leadership shapes not only this program but others that are patterned on it. The overriding attitude is one of acceptance and willingness to help people with whatever they want to learn. Whereas knowledge that an individual takes medication may be cited as a reason for exclusion in some circumstances, at this centre such drugs are regarded a positive influence, stabilizing a person's health and an essential precondition to learning.

Literacy in a Community College...

A college program coordinator relates the following experience:

Our college was approached by the school, which said that Bernie was not surviving in that system. We were told that he needed an adult setting and an individualized program. At the same time we were advised, based on clinical assessments, that he might not fit in. Reports suggested he could not be in a group setting and that he did not have (nor would ever have) any social skills. The abuse and neglect that had shaped his early years still lingered, resulting in episodes of emotional upset. So we knew that if he were to come to college he would need a support worker, at least initially. We figured there had to be a way to find the funds and we did.

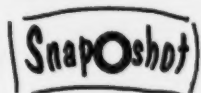
He came into basic adult upgrading, although initially on a one-on-one basis. We knew the advantages the setting could offer him: computers; small classes; and an exceptional worker on our staff. We asked him what he wanted and he replied, "To have my own business" and "To have my room all wired for music." So in planning his program we built on all the math and communication skills he would need were he to go into business. Given his fascination with computers and phonetic reading, we invited the electrician on campus into this discussion, who was very surprised to be asked. The electrician remodelled one of the computers for him and has since



become very intrigued with Bernie's electronic abilities. (From time to time the electrician is also called on to provide the occasional rescue operation.)

Bernie is now in a classroom with eight others, although he attends only a half day, finding the full day too stressful. He is beginning to take instruction directly from the teacher, and his aide, picking up on this cue, is spending less time in class. Next on the agenda is a part-time work placement. Maybe it is time to write to the head of the assessment team to tell them how wrong Bernie has proven them.

This demonstrates the capacity of college settings to deploy their considerable resources and wide-ranging expertise to provide literacy education for people with intellectual disabilities. There must of course be entry criteria that do not restrict but encourage access, trained instructors who can creatively explore opportunities, flexibility within the system to adapt programs to individual students and evaluation standards which value personal growth and development.



Literacy in the workplace...

Jerry

Jerry worked in a restaurant in food preparation and, although he couldn't read, he was able to

memorize the recipe well enough to do his job. He ran into trouble, however, whenever he was asked to make only half the recipe. He did not know how to make the necessary calculations to adjust the proportions. A tutor helped him acquire the literacy skills he needed to hold onto his job.

Justin

Justin performed janitorial services at a large urban mall. His employer was pleased with his work but felt Justin was at risk given the nature of his responsibilities and his limited reading skills. Of particular concern was the fact that Justin would not be able to recognize when the substances he was handling were toxic. Another problem was his difficulty reading instructions, which forced him to rely on a co-worker. This presented logistical problems because much of his work was done after hours when only a few people were around. A tutor who met with him at the mall helped him begin to acquire these work-related skills.

Tracy

Tracy always wanted to work the cash but she knew she didn't have the math skills to do it. Her company changed over to computerized registers and she hoped she might finally have a crack at the job. If someone would only show her how, she was sure she could learn how to punch the menu pad. She would still have to put the

correct change together, but at least the machine would tell her the exact amount she needed. Working with an instructor to make change became the focus of her workplace literacy program.

Mary-Ann

Mary-Ann had a part-time job stocking shelves but had difficulty when the ticketing gun skipped the prices up or down because she was unsure of the numbering sequence. Learning the numbers so that she could perform the job more accurately became her literacy goal.

David

A community employment agency was able to secure both workplace literacy and a college reading program for David, with good results. According to the agency manager, David was about to be fired from his job as a food preparation assistant in a local restaurant because he could not read recipes. "We did the patchwork and trained him in over 100 recipes. At the same time we enrolled him in a reading program. This was two and a half years ago. Now he's the right hand man to the same chef who was about to let him go originally. When the chef moves, he moves too."

The achievements by the people in these workplace vignettes are the result of a firm belief in each worker's ability to learn, individualized curriculum and instruction and a capacity to respond to and support people according to their needs. 



Chapter 3

Components of Successful Programs

An investigation of programs providing inclusive literacy education across the country reveals key factors which determine a program's ability to serve people with intellectual disabilities. The more programs embrace these components, the more accessible students will find them.

Strong Leadership

- ✍ The initial founder is a "visionary."

- ✍ Principals or program directors believe in every student's potential and accept people with disabilities on equal terms with other learners. Strong leaders inspire staff to believe they can build literacy skills in every person.

- ✍ Literacy program coordinators firmly believe that people with intellectual disabilities can learn. This message is communicated to both tutors and students in words and actions. Tutors often face students with very little belief in themselves after years of failure.

- ✍ Leaders recognize the importance of providing initial training as well as moral and

practical support to tutors until relationships with students are well established.

- ✍ Program heads are willing to take a hands-on approach to tutoring. When the inevitable difficulties arise — a student arrives late or not at all, a tutor shows signs of frustration — the program head is willing to intervene. This might mean phoning to see if a student is ill, organizing meetings with support networks, changing schedules or contacting outside agencies.

- ✍ Strong leaders take on an advocacy role, working for literacy policies and the availability of resources that support equal access and full participation.

- ✍ Flexibility, a willingness to learn from every situation and an ability to teach across a broad spectrum of differences characterize effective leadership.

Supportive Instructors and Tutors

- ✍ Effective tutors demonstrate competence and confidence that they can build literacy skills. They believe firmly in students' ability to learn.

- ✍ They have good people skills.

- ✍ They appreciate the obstacles overcome by people with disabilities in getting to the program and they are conscious of avoiding prejudicial attitudes and experiences.

- ✍ As partners in the learning process, they encourage students to make choices about what interests them and what skills they want to develop further.

- ✍ They draw on and utilize students' life experiences as learning tools.

- ✍ They recognize the connection between providing literacy education and providing students with a means of empowerment.

Inclusive Eligibility Criteria and Assessments

- ✍ Entry criteria are broad so that anyone with difficulties reading or writing is eligible.

- ✍ People have only to show up, identify themselves and participate in an interview to see how the program could work for them.

- ✍ No one is screened out because of their reading or ability, (although even the most inclusive programs admit this sometimes occurs if there are behavioural concerns regarding a student).

- ✍ An assessment is conducted in order to determine a person's skill level and to select a suitable tutor, not to establish ineligibility.

- ✍ The assessment is not threatening but conducted through informal discussion, reading inventories, learning the person's history and observing the student's performance.

Individualized Method of Instruction and Use of Resources

- ✍ The curriculum is based on the individual goals of the student.

- ✍ Students participate actively in choosing methods and materials.

- ✍ The coordinator is available to meet with students to assess the compatibility between learner and instructor.

- ✍ Instructors adapt materials to students' own experiences when unable to find materials that are age- and skill-appropriate.

- ✍ Some programs collect and publish learners' writings, finding this a powerful reinforcement to learning.

- ✍ Programs have access to a diversity of resources.¹⁰

Provision of Supports to Increase Accessibility

- ✍ Architectural accessibility is basic to integration. A learner in a wheelchair needs to be able to get in.



Effective tutors have learned that it is not enough to teach skills narrowly but that they have to focus on issues which make sense in the person's life. They acknowledge the turmoil people may be in and they recognize that, although they are not able to solve these problems, they do have the capacity to offer advice, support and friendship.

Some programs provide child care, counselling services and extra support for people with intellectual disabilities.

Some programs are offered both during the day and in the evening to encourage participation.

Successful programs recognize the significance of communication-assisting devices as critical tools of literacy.

Personal supports are provided. These might include emotional support and motivational support, assistance during mealtimes, assistance using the washroom or turning pages of a book. Programs serving people with intellectual disabilities recognize that often a person's ability to secure attendant care determines their ability to participate in literacy programs.

Opportunities for Tutor Training and Tutor Support

Inclusive literacy education is found where tutors are provided with opportunities for ongoing training and where there are

materials to ensure the best possible instruction for the students.

Those who provide tutor training have opportunities to share ideas and strategies with counterparts in all types of literacy programs.

An essential focus of the training is the promotion of positive tutor attitudes regarding the abilities of people with disabilities.

The combination of pre-service workshops and regular meetings provide opportunities to discuss a range of instructional issues. These issues might address materials, resources, methods, behaviour parameters, lesson structures and content, and measures of success.

Some programs provide sensitivity training, in which prospective tutors hear from students. Learners' writings depicting their emotions and their struggle are read aloud. Usually there is time for questions and answers where tutors gain insight into students' experiences as a result of having been labelled.

Because the steps learners make are small, volunteers may not recognize achievement. Volunteer tutors are supported to identify the progress being made by their students. The tutors are valued for their contribution to the students' progress. Coordinators help them to appreciate the time learners sometimes require, and encourage volunteer perseverance.



Flexible Approaches to Evaluation

✍ Programs are more likely to be inclusive if sponsors (funders) do not dictate success according to external criteria such as employability or standardized testing.

✍ Successful programs foster student responsibility for their own learning. They recognize that it is a sign of progress when students take an active interest in, and direct, their own learning. This is not always easy, given that people with intellectual disabilities have been socialized, often unnecessarily, to depend on others.

✍ Effective programs support students to change their concept of reading and writing; for example, giving less attention to the mechanical aspects of speaking correctly or printing neatly and focusing instead on comprehension.

✍ Signs of success are identified in many aspects of a person's life, beyond the classroom. Sometimes the impact is first noticed by other people in the learner's life. One man described his brother's development:

When he started at the Read-Write Centre the change in him was incredible. It was like watching a seed germinate and grow. Now he has a good job, lives in his own apartment and drives a car. He has become self-confident and knows he can look after himself.¹¹

Outreach

✍ Inclusive programs reach out to provide information to prospective learners in the community. Many potential students expect their goals of improved reading and writing to go unrealized; many say they do not know of any community-based programs designed to increase literacy skills.

Conventional literacy programs are perceived as being too academic and, therefore, not for them.

✍ Inclusive programs reach out to invite other literacy programs to be more inclusive. No single program should be the sole option for people with disabilities. Outreach is critical given the high need for literacy among this population.

✍ Inclusive programs target institutional settings, where people with intellectual disabilities are still residents, in their outreach effort.

✍ An information directory of accessible Adult Basic Literacy programs assists prospective learners to locate a program.

✍ Programs committed to providing outreach gather information on support services (attendant care, assistive devices, transportation). They also link students to other opportunities such as multicultural agencies, job opportunities, work training or unemployment insurance. ✍



Chapter 4.

A Sampling of Successful Instructional Methods

Many strategies are used in teaching reading, writing and numeracy to help people with intellectual disabilities achieve their learning goals. There is no single method that is universally effective. Whatever works for an individual learner becomes an effective method. Here tutors describe 10 strategies they used successfully.

1. Language experience writing.

Individually...

I have found the most successful strategy to be one where students dictate their ideas to their tutors and then learn to read these stories, first with assistance and then alone. Once they realize their stories are worth writing about, there's a flood. Sometimes they need help getting ideas out. Sometimes their first sentences contain only two words.

In a group...

Sometimes people have a hard time getting their story out and the group can help with that. A succinct statement: "I lived on a farm," becomes much expanded when the

questions flow from the others: Who did you live with? Were they good to you? What work did you do?

2. Photo stories about a person's job or volunteer work.

To take the language experience a step further, I went with a student to where she did her volunteer work and we took a series of pictures related to her responsibilities and the people she liked. She selected her favourites for an album and then we developed text to accompany the photographs. She practised reading it constantly and I also know she carried it in her knapsack everywhere she went.

3. Stories and other reading material on topics compatible with a student's interest.

Five people who joined our literacy program lived in an institution when they were children. They have memories of being unhappy and uncared for and wanted others to know what it was like to grow up in



an institution in the '50s and '60s. They formed the oral history group. Some group members told their stories while others took on the jobs of interviewers, photographers, actors, artists and editors.

4. Building a basic vocabulary on flash cards.

This can come out of a person's story or some other area of interest. There are times when I have the student dictate a story of his own choice and length. I type it onto my computer, print it out, put the key words on flash cards and use this to help him tell his own story and draw out his own memories. He can measure by the growing stack of cards how he is progressing.

5. Assisted or paired reading from accessible books and taped books.

In looking for appropriate materials, I find the most useful books might have only two to four sentences on each page and a picture to give the student a clear idea of what the story is about. A tutor or another member of the group may provide assistance; students like to teach one another.

6. Encouraging writing (independent writing, keeping a journal).

On their first day in the program, all students receive a blank notebook

which becomes their text. They fill it with writing which provides material for reading.

7. Computer-assisted literacy.

I have found the computer has been a tremendous help in its capacity for repetition, which far exceeds what I can give. However, a computer cannot give adequate encouragement and recognition when the student needs a boost to his morale. I, as his tutor, can also take what he is learning at the CAL [computer-assisted literacy] and apply these skills to his daily living experiences. I have noticed a great improvement in his communication skills and self-confidence, in addition to his reading skills.

8. Using materials appropriate for learners' goals.

These might include recipes, manuals, charts or graphs from the actual job or living situation. Bringing materials to the tutorial or class is an effective way of involving the learner.

We meet at the Burger Factory where we chat about a variety of topics. We read the menu, the cash register receipt and determine where we catch the bus — based on street signs, not landmarks. Then we go to class together.

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9. Options for instruction (individually or in groups).

Most learners seem to prefer a one-on-one tutorial when they start because they feel a little shy.

However, tutors claim that there are advantages to learning in a group because the conversations and interactions are stimulating and because students are keen to teach one another. Although tutors need a wide range of skills to teach such diversity, many tutors prefer it.

When an adult literacy program in our city changed format from one-on-one tutoring to small groups, one learner who had been attending for months quit, indicating she felt abandoned.

On the other hand...

Someone who had been referred to us from a group program for one-on-one tutoring lasted three months before returning to his original group. I had the sense he enjoyed the learning that came from observing and participating in a group, whereas he appeared to find the tutorial somewhat threatening.

10. Open approach to curriculum.

We believe that if you can say it in language or draw it we can translate it or interpret it. Once you can say it or draw it, this is used as a first reader. The curriculum is what is in the person's head.

Many common themes emerge from the experiences of learners whose participation in literacy programs have enabled them to achieve their goals. They know that the placement of people with intellectual disabilities in institutions did not prepare them to live in the community. Although these institutions were frequently named Hospital Schools, they did not teach people how to read and write.¹² Learners have come to recognize how unfairly they were judged in the past — by teachers too quick to assume their inability to learn and to dismiss them.

Now they talk about the choice in their lives. They feel a sense of freedom as they decide how to lead their lives. They are responsible for making decisions about how to juggle work and ball games, about decorating their apartments and writing cheques for their rent, and about friendships, relationships and children.¹³

Literacy enhances people's opportunities to avoid lifetime poverty; it improves their ability to get real jobs and better health care. Significantly, literacy improves the chance of receiving fair treatment and not being denied basic human rights. Whether it is used for voting in an election, signing a contract or filing a complaint with the human rights commission, literacy is important.¹⁴ 

Chapter 5.

Tutor Competencies and Attitudes: Questions and Answers

Tutors' knowledge and attitudes in working with people with intellectual disabilities is a critical determinant of success.

Q. What are the attributes of a good instructor?

It is widely believed that instructors are the key to a successful program. Although the list is long, the most frequently identified qualities include:

- Respect for the learners
- Honesty
- Sense of humour
- Flexibility and creativity
- A good self-image
- Good listening and communication skills
- Perseverance
- Patience
- Enthusiasm
- Interpersonal sensitivity
- Knowledge of the subject matter
- Concern for the whole person¹⁵

It is important to create a safe learning environment, physically as well as psychologically. Given

that most learners will have had a history of negative school experiences, it is crucial to build up their confidence and emphasize the positive, however incremental the learners' gains.

Q. What are two critical points a tutor should remember?

Those who provide training to literacy tutors say that the importance of allowing student choice cannot be stressed too often. In addition, they emphasize the need for repetition and the use of a familiar and predictable text at the early learning stage.

Q. Will people with intellectual disabilities make progress in literacy programs?

The coordinator of a learner's program in a Maritime province answers this way: "We do not encounter problems providing literacy education to people with a mental handicap. When you treat



an adult with respect and dignity it makes a whole world of difference and removes a lot of the barriers."¹⁶

A person with an intellectual disability has probably had less schooling and fewer opportunities to practise learning. It is important to set a goal and identify small steps that will indicate progress towards that goal. Those connected to successful programs suggest that tutors begin by believing in people and in people's abilities to learn and by not prejudging. They insist it is important to get to know the person first and to nurture people's self-confidence.

This approach, however, may not be universally accepted. McBeth, in her article "Is Believing in Ourselves Enough?", says, "Critics of community literacy programs call this approach 'feel-good literacy'. They fear that we are not putting enough emphasis on teaching content. But I am convinced that it is very, very wrong to under-value the importance of 'feeling good' in learning. Feeling good really means believing in yourself."¹⁷

Q. If tutors are volunteers and do not have special training to work with people with disabilities, do they have to work

with people who have been labelled? What if they do not have the skill?

Tutor training is a critical factor in an inclusive literacy program. A coordinator will want to pass on optimism and enthusiasm to tutors in addition to constructive teaching approaches and strategies. One effective training vehicle is a student panel where tutors' attitudes are confronted head-on.¹⁸ A series of questions can be put to the panel such as: "Were you ever made fun of at school?", "Did your teachers think you couldn't learn?" and "What would you say to a tutor who is nervous about working with someone who is labelled?" This goes a long way towards dispelling myths and the apprehensions of new volunteer tutors.

Still, volunteers may feel uncomfortable. They may insist they are not trained and therefore not qualified. Sometimes these arguments are red herrings and not the real issue. A positive attitude and confidence are the determinants of successful inclusion. If a volunteer fails to be convinced, the coordinator will have to decide whether this tutor should continue to be associated with the program. If the issue is one of prejudice and discrimination, consideration will have to be given to whether this attitude will negatively affect the entire learning environment.



Q. What if a learner seems to be looking for a friend and is not terribly interested in learning to read and write?

It often becomes apparent that students may want a friend, an ally, an advocate or a confidant in order to help them through difficult situations such as moving away from their parents' influence. They may want to concentrate their learning in order to get a job or establish a bank account to achieve this greater independence. One program¹⁹ has attempted to broaden the definition of tutor to include peer, partner and perhaps, they claim, "if all parties are lucky, friend".

Some programs encourage the development of friendships. They may contact organizations such as Citizen Advocacy, Big Brothers or Big Sisters, or suggest interest-related groups at a community centre, adult education course or local YM/YWCA.

Q. Should literacy education address behavioural issues?

A person's behaviour is a form of communication. One way of addressing challenging behaviour is by helping individuals acquire more acceptable communication skills,

such as listening and talking. The literacy program or tutorial should remain the focus but the learner's behaviour can change incidentally as a by-product of their growing self-esteem and confidence as they acquire better communication skills. Tutoring is a powerful vehicle for self-improvement; its strength resides in the tutor-learner relationship and has nothing to do with structured behaviour modification techniques. The tutor makes a voluntary commitment, from which can flow the possibility of an authentic relationship, a key factor in positive behavioural change.

Q. How can tutors support the move away from a charitable model of voluntarism towards one of greater equality between tutor and learner?

It is important that tutors listen when learners talk about the realities of their lives. The social, political and economic situations in which they live testify to the isolation and poverty associated with having a disability in our society. Opportunities to listen to learners' experiences provide tutors with deeper understanding and many tutors attest to the learning they themselves gain from



the tutor-learner relationship. This can lead to discussion and collective action for social change.

Q. How can tutors assist people to take responsibility for their own learning and help undo the learned dependency that is so much a part of the life experience of people with disabilities?

The common experience of people with intellectual disabilities is characterized by low expectations others hold regarding their abilities. It also includes the absence of opportunities for making choices and decisions in matters that affect their lives. Generally they have been encouraged to be dependent. Although many are able to acquire literacy skills, their lack of autonomy hinders their ability to direct their own learning and set their own goals. The challenge for literacy education should be to provide reading and writing skills as a means of empowerment. Assisting people to acquire these skills provides them with a means for participating in community life.

Inviting speakers to make presentations on current public issues provides a springboard for discussion and writing and, ultimately, an opportunity for

learners to become engaged in topical subjects. From such occasions, students gain recognition of common problems among them and a common willingness to act. When students hold meetings, reach out to other groups, write letters, invite speakers and organize activities, they are using literacy skills to bring about changes that will make an important difference in their lives. ✍

Conclusion

Future Challenges

Inclusive literacy programs are making considerable headway but they face a number of challenges:

1. Students with intellectual disabilities frequently do not graduate to the "next step," whether that be a job or an educational milestone. These students stay much longer than the program originally intended and have a tendency to see the program less for education and more for socialization. Some programs have enough flexibility to accommodate this, others do not.

2. Non-labelled students who are learning to read and write are sometimes threatened by the association with labelled students. Some already feel vulnerable to the stigma of illiteracy or may have once been labelled, which hindered earlier educational experiences. They may fear that the association with people who have been labelled will set them back. Consequently they may be inclined to stay away from programs and sessions that are attended by people with disabilities.

3. When too many people with disabilities are in one particular class, the proportions are unbalanced and there is a risk of segregation.

4. When word gets out that a literacy program includes people with an intellectual disability, people will often flock to it and the program becomes overfilled. In their effort to be inclusive, programs may face the dilemma of having to refuse people admittance for lack of space.

5. Programs that provide literacy but do not have the resources to provide adequate supports are faced with a difficult choice. Either they deploy valuable teacher and volunteer resources to provide attendant care or they only admit people who can bring their own aides.



Future Directions

Inclusive programs have a role to play in securing greater access to literacy for people with disabilities. They can:

1. Advocate for people with disabilities to be integrated into regular classes in neighbourhood literacy programs. Integration seldom happens by chance; it needs to be facilitated and supported.
2. Provide leadership to other programs by speaking and writing about strategies for successful inclusion, conducting training for volunteers and staff and building community awareness.
3. Ensure that, where provincial literacy policy is being developed, the needs of people with intellectual disabilities are recognized. Policy principles that propose eligibility criteria for entrance or criteria for time-limited participation will further entrench the exclusion of people labelled intellectually disabled from programs.
4. Join coalitions with other human justice groups that are lobbying for human rights, access and equality for all Canadian citizens. 

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Notes



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For more information please contact:

The Roeher Institute
Kinsmen Building, York University,
4700 Keele Street,
North York, Ontario M3J 1P3
Telephone: (416) 661-9611
Fax: (416) 661-5701
TDD: (416) 661-2023

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entourage is on the leading edge of constructive ideas and theories in the field of intellectual and other disabilities. Its timely articles identify the latest directions for change and new ways of understanding inclusive communities and economies. For information on subscribing please contact The Roeher Institute.

LITERACY IN MOTION

- 1. The **inclusive** approach is based on the belief that the role of people with disabilities is to be defined in literacy education in terms of their own strengths and experiences. The inclusive approach is committed to greater involvement of people with disabilities at the literacy education process, and to all of which are venues where people with disabilities are included. It examines the role of people with disabilities and inclusion and allows them to be part of the process, as well as to be a part of the process. It is a process of intellectual and social development, and it is a process of intellectual and social development.

Inclusive programs are those in which

- 1. The role of people with disabilities is to be defined in literacy education and the role of people with disabilities is to be defined in literacy education and the role of people with disabilities is to be defined in literacy education.
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